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ABSTRACT

Two powerful images for women as teachers and principals, the schoolmarm and the token administrator, were discerned in a study which analyzed the life histories of 24 women and men working in elementary or secondary schools in Toronto, Canada between 1930 and 1980. These two images have contributed to a continued pattern of underrepresentation for women in school administration. The paper argues that it is not part of the nature of things that men should manage while women teach in the schools--rather this division of labor in schools has developed over time through social negotiation and conflict. Clarification of some of the elements of that negotiation and conflict will help to understand more clearly how cultural factors can inhibit and foster change and how the images of women as schoolmarms and tokens have functioned to maintain patriarchal traditions in school culture in the past. A number of initiatives indicate that Canadian schools are entering a period ripe with potential for changes in regard to men's and women's roles in schools. Presently some provinces have begun pay equity legislation. In other places government funding is fostering employment equity policies and programs. However, sufficient recognition of the power of cultural images and the need to understand the social processes whereby such images can be changed are necessary for boys and girls to learn how to recreate their roles in new and powerful ways which could be beneficial to society. (MS)

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Schoolmarms and Tokens: Outdated Images for Women in Education

The words teacher and principal are readily associated with a rich complement of images. The persons who enact these roles soon find that they do so under the influence of those who have preceded them. The physical stage for the drama of school life, although it varies in particulars, in many respects resembles the past. The actors too, while unique to their time and place, portray roles which in some respects have been written for them but which they have the potential to recreate.

In a recent interview study[1] I utilized the sharper detail of a limited time period and a restricted focus on a small number of women and men to investigate school culture through the perceptions of those who have been actively involved in its construction by virtue of their participation in the roles of teacher and school principal. Twenty-four women and men who held both those roles in either elementary or secondary schools in Toronto, Canada between 1930 and 1980 told me their life histories. These men and women represent two consecutive generations of individuals who have held these roles because half of them began teaching prior to WW II (1920s and 1930s) and subsequently became orincipals in the 1950s or 1960s and the other half began teaching after WW II (1950s or 1960s) and became principals in the 1970s or 1980s.

In this paper I examine two powerful images for women as teachers and principals which were prevalent in the accounts given by the men and women in this study. I illustrate how these two images have contributed to a continued pattern of underrepresentation for women in school administration. I argue that it is not part of the nature of things that men should manage while women teach in our schools, rather the division of labour in schools has developed over time through social negotiation and conflict. The clarification of some of the elements of that negotiation and conflict allows us to more clearly

understand how cultural factors can inhibit and foster change. I will show how the images of women as schoolmarms and tokens have functioned to maintain patriarchal traditions in school culture in the past.

The Schoolmarm

The schoolmarm image appears to have a fairly long tradition in school culture. In the Canadian context its origins appear to stem from the establishment of "common" or publicly funded schools in each province. While local circumstances no doubt created variations, there seem to be certain overarching elements which remained relatively constant over time.

The earliest versions of the schoolmarm image discussed by the participants in my study were revealed in their discussions of their own schooling. They described the schoolmarm in the setting of the one-room schoolhouse in the rural countryside. She was virtuous, hard-working and fulfilled her duties out of a sense of responsibility.

A perusal of the early contracts and list of duties for teachers clearly indicates that both male and female teachers' lives were severly restricted according to our present-day perceptions. We can also see that the rules governing the behaviour of women teachers were more extensively prohibitive than those for men. Such rules offer a good indication of the parameters of the schoolmarm image. The "prim and proper" schoolmarm was visible evidence of the positive outcome possible to all individuals in the society if they availed themselves of the opportunities for education which the common schools could now provide. Ideally, the schoolmarm was not only clever but also attractive and willing to give generously of her time and talents for the good of the community at large. Her financial reward for doing so was at the discretion of the local school board members. Although her wage was meagre in comparison with what was paid to men who taught or to what most men could earn in the paid labour force, it compared favourably to what women could make

in almost any field open to them. Indeed, the schoolmarm was one of the few women in most communities who was actually paid a wage at all.

According to the ideal image of the schoolmarm, however, she only worked until marriage, at which time her financial and emotional needs were ideally met through her membership in her family and she retired into the private sphere of the community. The schoolmarm who did not marry broke this convention and for her the image of the spinster combined with that of the schoolmarm to produce a negative picture of a woman who had gained financial independence of a sort in the public sphere, but who failed to become a wife or mother, the roles held out by society as being those most "natural" and fulfilling for women.

The following three elements then can be identified as constituting the image of the schoolmarm: a) her sense of duty; b) her commitment to hard work and c) the social acceptance of her role as one which is appropriate and even admirable for women.

In the accounts of early childhood, women in both generations in the study reveal how their early socialization as daughters and female students prepared them for the adoption of the role of the schoolmarm. They described how parental and societal expectations for dutiful daughters differed from those for dutiful sons. While men in the study agreed that good sons were expected to become independent and move away from their parents' households and set up their own households, men and women agreed that good daughters were encouraged to stay "close to home" and learn how to put their own needs secondary to the needs of others. Daughters were to be virtuous, clever, attractive, unselfish, quiet and careful to maintain good order and good spirits within the household. It is easy to see how such training prepared them to accept the sense of duty expected of the schoolmarm to her school and its community.

In their descriptions of themselves as students there is also a strong indication that women were well prepared for becoming schoolmarms. Repeatedly, women in both generations attributed their success at school to their hard work. In contrast, most men stated that they succeeded by virtue of their abilities and skills. Thus, the hard work expected of the schoolmarm was something women had learned to value and expect as part of their life in schools.

Also, there were some very real differences in the way that men and women in the two groups described factors affecting their decisions to become teachers. For women, one of the major "selling features" for the role was that they felt that it was an appropriate choice, it was seen by them and by others as "a good job for a woman". The image of the schoolmarm, however, was such a powerful one that most men reported that when they decided to become teachers they generally met with disapproval from their parents and others who felt that it was not really the best choice they could have made and that it was more appropriate for women than men, particularly at the elementary level.

What all of this indicates is the extent to which the schoolmarm image was closely tied to the early socialization of young women. While that experience prepared them well for adopting the schoolmarm's role and upholding its traditional aspects, it also encouraged them to remain in that role rather than trying to change it or move out of the classroom and into school administrative roles. While men's early socialization may have left them ill-prepared to become schoolmarms, they were relatively well-prepared to become the male version, the schoolmaster. As urban multi-grade schools develped over time this role of schoolmaster and not that of the schoolmarm translated into that of the manager or school principal. My point is that even when the more gender-neutral term of teacher replaced terms such as

schoolmarm and schoolmaster, the imagery and restrictions of those early terms tended to remain and to socially constitute different locations for male teachers and female teachers within school culture.

We can recognize that the teacher's role in many respects has changed over the last fifty years but there are certain elements that seem to have remained relatively constant. The relative consistency in early socialization for males and females appears to have perpetuated separate images for men and women who work in schools. That separation partly explains why women have tended to remain as classroom teachers while men have tended to move out of the classroom and into school administration. Schoolmarms, whether in 1880 or 1980, occupy socially acceptable locations in school culture only as long as they are true to their sense of duty and their commitment to hard work in classrooms.

One important element of the schoolmarm image that has changed, however, is their marital status. In the period following WW II, largely due to a teacher shortage, considerable pressure was brought to bear on school boards to continue to employ the married female teachers they had hired during the war years. Slowly, boards overturned official bans against married women teachers and slowly it became commonplace for women teachers not only to be married but to have children of their own. While ostensibly such a change would seem to work toward substantially altering the image of the schoolmarm, I argue that even this dramatic change did little to interrupt old versions of the schoolmarm image. The reasons for this are largely because there were continued pressures within school culture and the larger culture which fostered the idea that women should look upon their paid labour as secondary to their "real" work in their families. This meant that they were to be schoolmarms in the traditional sense while at work and wives and mothers at all other times. They were expected to work as hard and be as committed as

earlier schoolmarms had been and any inability to do so was held as evidence of their difference from and inferiority to men who taught.

The Token

While most women in schools over the last fifty years have worked as classroom teachers, a few have taken on roles as school administrators. In doing so they might be seen as potential pioneers who could change traditional patterns. Statistics on the participation of women in such roles, however, show that rather than a steady increase in the participation of women in such roles there have been relatively stable percentages for women, particularly in secondary schools at the level of the principalship. What I will argue here is that the continuation of the tradition that school principals are most appropriately male has been fostered through another image for women in education, that of the token women administrator.

This image is a relatively recent one within school culture and is stongly linked to the usage of the term in the wider society to refer to any member of a subgroup who participates in a role that is generally held by another cultural subgroup. Such groupings can be based on various characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age or gender. The token is usually appointed to satisfy a particular need within an organization or to meet the demands for access by members of a particular subgroup. Tokens are generally placed in marginal positions where they are not really expected to effect change. Their appointment rather than their activities in their role is what is significant. Often, tokens run the risk of alienation from members of their own subgroup by virtue of moving into a role which is generally not available to others in that subgroup. They are also usually not well accepted by others who act within the role because their subgroup status rather than their ability is seen as the reason for their promotion.

None of the women in my study said that <u>they</u> were tokens since they

felt sure that it was their ability rather than their gender that led to their appointment as principal. Most of the women and men, however, could readily discuss how some other women they knew were indeed token principals. Many women stated that it was not because they were women that they had been selected for promotion, indeed, they felt that it was in spite of it.

A close examination of their backgrounds and the types of experiences they reported as principals suggests that despite such denials, most of these women were treated as if they were tokens even though they themselves did not like to accept that image. For example, all of the women in both generations were given principalships which in one respect or another could be described as marginal. Those in the first generation had all been appointed to either single sex girls' schools, vocational schools or schools with experimental programs or known special difficulties. While at first glance this seemed to have changed for women in the second generation who seemed to be given appointments in regular high schools or elementary schools, closer examination revealed that these women had also been given the lion's share of temporary appointments, schools marked for closing, or other less prestigious positions within the system. As one of the younger women put it: "Men could do the dirty jobs but more often than not they were given to the women because the women had proven that they could handle them."

Using a token woman for such potentially problematic positions was indeed beneficial to the organization. As an outsider who wasn't really a representative of that organization, her failure could be deemed as the result of her personal failure. If she happened to succeed despite the odds, then the organization could claim to have had the foresight to have picked the right individual for the task. Either way, the risk was placed more heavily on the shoulders of the token than on those who held power within the traditional group of male administrators.

Women in both generations also talked about a sense of isolation in their role as school principal. They talked about walking into meetings that were "a sea of three-piece suits" and of experiencing sitting alone at conferences as their male colleagues chose to sit elsewhere. This suggests how the gender of these women, something they could not change no matter how they were to behave, acted to sustain the image of them as token rather than real colleagues.

By leaving the classroom and adopting a legitimated leadership role within the school these women principals had also openly declared to other women in the school culture that they were not willing to be "just a schoolmarm". This declaration placed them in a precarious position vis-a-vis their female colleagues who could interpret such a move as a threat to their own traditional roles. The image of the token woman administrator then places her in a nether world between the traditional male world of her fellow administrators and the traditionally female world of her classroom colleagues.

These two images for women in schools, that of schoolmarm and token administrator can act in a mutually sustaining way. When this happens the consequences for women remain largely negative but the patriarchal traditions within school culture remain largely intact even when circumstances begin to change. Thus, minor adjustments can be made to accomodate women but control of the cultural norms still rests largely with men rather than women. This does not mean that women are not actively creating that culture but it means that by sustaining such images they may be unwittingly perpetuating cultural practices which may benefit some women but which fail to significantly alter a division of labour within schools which uses gender as a base.

The schoolmarm image if perpetuated can keep both men and women who might significantly contribute to bringing about deep-seated change within school culture from even considering teaching as a viable career option. The image

can also discourage women from considering movement into administration as appropriate for them. It can also mean that men assume that to stay in the classroom or to work at primary levels is somehow a negative and unmasculine thing to do. The image can also perpetuate the idea that women who do want to become administrators are somehow turning their back on tradition and adopting "masculine" rather than "feminine" values and behaviours.

The token image for women in school administration may also act to deter many women from seeking such a role because they see how difficult that position has been for other women. It perpetuates the dominance of certain "masculine" values and behaviours amongst both men and women who become school administrators and mitigates against deep-seated changes in the culture of school administrators by fostering traditions from the past, traditions that have mitigated against women's participation as full and equal colleagues.

There are a number of initiatives in Canadian schools at present which indicate that we are entering a period ripe with potential for changes in regard to men's and women's roles in schools. In some provinces there is recent pay equity legislation. In other places government funding is fostering employment equity policies and programs. Some movement is also being made to initiate courses for both pre-service and practising teachers which can help them recognize the need for dealing with gender-related issues in their classrooms which not only affect their students but their own work lives. What I am strongly stating in this paper is that without sufficient recognition of the power of cultural images and the need to understand the social processes whereby such images can be changed, old traditions and images may merely undergo some surface adjustments and men and women, boys and girls may continue to portray roles which have been written for them rather than learning how to recreate those roles in new and powerful ways which could benefit us all.

NOTES

1 Reynolds C.(1987) Naming the Experience: Women, Men and their Changing Work Lives as Teachers and Principals.Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto